



Australian Government

Australian Security  
Intelligence Organisation

# ASIO Domestic and Family Violence Strategy

2018–20



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## Message from the Director-General

At ASIO, we are strongly committed to building on our diverse and inclusive environment, which includes providing a safe and supportive workplace for all staff. I recognise the impact domestic and family violence has on people, impacting their wellbeing both personally and professionally. I am also committed to enhancing our culture, one in which all staff feel confident and empowered, and able to seek the support they may need, when they need it.

Regrettably, there is an increasing prevalence of domestic and family violence in Australia. This often leads to tragic outcomes that impact not only the victims, but also their family, friends and the broader community. Everyone has a role in opposing domestic and family violence and in understanding and countering the underlying causes. While gender inequality is a key factor, it is important to be aware that domestic and family violence can affect anyone, it does not discriminate on gender or diversity characteristics.

Domestic and family violence is not just a personal matter but a workplace issue too. Financial independence is a key enabling factor for people in such challenging circumstances to take control and

potentially leave their situation. The workplace can also be a refuge; a safe space as well as provide a support network for those impacted by domestic and family violence.

ASIO does not tolerate domestic and family violence. This type of behaviour has no place in ASIO. ASIO's values—*excellence, integrity, respect, cooperation and accountability*—are the foundation of a shared standard of behavior. Behaviours that are contrary to these intrinsic values must be called out.

As Director-General and a leader involved in the Male Champions of Change program, I remain committed to challenging inequity in all forms and the problems that stem from it.

This Strategy provides the framework for ASIO's approach to addressing the issue of domestic and family violence. We are all responsible for contributing to the solution; to work together to ensure our workplace is safe, supportive and inclusive of everyone.

I commend this Strategy to you and applaud ASIO taking a stand against domestic and family violence.

**Duncan Lewis**  
Director-General

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## Purpose

The purpose of the Domestic and Family Violence Strategy (the Strategy) is to outline ASIO's position on domestic and family violence, to ensure the workplace is a safe space for staff experiencing domestic and family violence and to provide staff with an understanding of what assistance and support options are available.

The Strategy provides guidance on identifying domestic and family violence, the relevance to the workplace and outlines the response to cases where a staff member is the victim or perpetrator of domestic and family violence.

## What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence does not only refer to physical abuse. It encompasses acts of violence, intimidation and coercion occurring between people who have, or had, an intimate, familial or domestic relationship. Not all aspects of domestic and family violence are criminal and some can be difficult to recognise as acts of domestic or family violence, including by the person affected.

*Under the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth), family violence is defined as violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family or causes the family member to be fearful. Each state and territory also has their own criminal and civil definitions for family violence<sup>1</sup>.*

Domestic and family violence includes, but is not limited to, the following types of conduct:

- ▶ Assault;
- ▶ Sexual assault or other sexually abusive behavior;
- ▶ Stalking;
- ▶ Repeated derogatory taunts;
- ▶ Intentionally damaging or destroying property;
- ▶ Intentionally causing death or injury to an animal;
- ▶ Unreasonably denying the family member the financial autonomy that he or she would otherwise have had;
- ▶ Unreasonably withholding financial support needed to meet the reasonable living expenses of the family member, or his or her child, at a time when the family member is entirely or predominantly dependent on the person for financial support;
- ▶ Preventing the family member from making or keeping connections with his or her family, friends or culture; and
- ▶ Unlawfully depriving the family member or any member of the family member's family, of his or her liberty.

The term 'domestic and family violence' recognises that violence may occur in a variety of circumstances including but not limited to:

- ▶ Former and current intimate relationships, regardless of the gender identity or sexual orientation of the individuals involved;
- ▶ Relatives and guardians; and
- ▶ Relationships involving carers.

Domestic and family violence can affect anyone in a family or domestic relationship, including:

- ▶ People of all gender identities and sexual orientations;
- ▶ Adults and children;
- ▶ People from all socio-economic and educational demographics;
- ▶ People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and
- ▶ People needing care including those with disabilities and the elderly.

## Domestic and Family violence statistics<sup>ii</sup>

ON AVERAGE

1 

AUSTRALIAN  
WOMAN

*is killed each  
week by a current  
or former partner*

INDIGENOUS WOMEN ARE

32 

*times more likely to  
be hospitalized due  
to domestic violence  
than non-indigenous  
women*

1 in 6 

AUSTRALIAN  
WOMEN

*has experienced  
physical or sexual  
violence from a  
current or former  
partner since the  
age of 15*

WOMEN FROM CULTURALLY AND  
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

LESS LIKELY 

*than other  
groups of women  
to report violence*

1 in 16 

AUSTRALIAN MEN

*has experienced  
physical abuse  
from a current or  
former partner  
since the age of 15*

RATES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE

LGBTI

*community are  
equal to or higher  
than non-LGBTI  
but victims are  
less likely to seek  
support*

1 in 4 

AUSTRALIAN  
WOMEN

*has experienced  
emotional abuse  
from a current or  
former partner  
since the age of 15*

1 in 3 

AUSTRALIANS

*report having  
been in a  
relationship  
where a partner  
was abusive*

1 in 6 

AUSTRALIAN MEN

*has experienced  
emotional abuse  
from a current or  
former partner  
since the age of 15*

62% 

OF TRANSGENDER MALES AND

*have experienced  
abuse in their  
relationships*

WOMEN WITH A DISABILITY ARE

40% 

*more likely to be the  
victims of domestic  
violence than women  
without disability*

43% 

OF INTERSEX FEMALES

## Why is domestic and family violence a workplace issue?

Domestic and family violence can affect work performance and workplace safety, not only for the affected person but also for perpetrators and for their colleagues<sup>iii</sup>.

- ▶ Domestic and family violence may impact on the safety of the workplace for some employees. Employers have a duty to provide a safe work environment.
- ▶ The work performance of employees impacted by domestic and family violence may be affected.
- ▶ Domestic and family violence may lead to increased staff absenteeism, loss of productivity and increased staff turnover.

*Of the 1.4 million Australian women who are or have been in abusive relationships, about 800,000 are currently in the paid workforce<sup>iv</sup>.*

## ASIO's approach to domestic and family violence

ASIO recognises that family and domestic violence is not just a personal issue but also a workplace issue. All staff have a role in advocating for a safe work environment and ASIO is committed to providing a workplace that supports the safety and wellbeing of all staff, and in which staff are confident in seeking that support, when they need it.

ASIO acknowledges that colleagues and managers may be the first point of contact for an employee disclosing family and domestic violence, and is committed to equipping staff to appropriately deal with these situations. In the coming year, members of the Harassment and Discrimination Adviser (HaDA) network will undertake training on domestic and family violence. This training will equip those staff members willing to act as a contact point for affected staff and to guide them in accessing the various support options available. An eLearning module will also be developed and made available to all staff.

ASIO recognises domestic and family violence can be a deeply personal issue and is committed to supporting affected staff with dignity and respect. In assisting staff impacted by domestic and family violence, ASIO will apply discretion and maintain confidentiality of the individuals affected other than where law or policy requires information to be disclosed.

## Support for individuals experiencing domestic and family violence

ASIO is committed to creating an environment in which employees feel safe and are confident in seeking support. Those who have experienced domestic and family violence may continue to face risk, particularly where children are involved. We understand the pressure and long-term impact this can have on people.

## Domestic and family violence in the LGBTI Community

Domestic and family violence is significantly under-reported in the LGBTI community though LGBTI people are just as likely to experience domestic and family violence, with young LGBTI people at particular risk of family violence.

### Forms of family violence unique to the LGBTI community:

- ▶ Threatening to out, or 'outing' a partner or family member to family, friends or colleagues;
- ▶ Using homophobia as a tool of control, for example by telling a partner they will lose custody of children, be unable to access police assistance or support from service delivery organisations because the 'system' is homophobic;
- ▶ Telling a partner or family member they 'deserve it' because they are LGBTI or that they are not a 'real' lesbian, gay or bisexual person and relying on stereotypes to hide or justify abuse; and
- ▶ Threatening to or revealing HIV status, withdrawing care or blocking access to medical treatment where a partner or family member is dependent, for example arising from their HIV/AIDS status.



## Perpetrators of domestic and family violence

ASIO understands the workplace may include not only employees who are victims of, or affected by, domestic and family violence, but also perpetrators—and that this must also be handled appropriately and sensitively.

ASIO will not tolerate domestic and family violence being perpetrated in or from the workplace. The ASIO Code of Conduct requires employees, when acting in connection with ASIO employment, to treat others with courtesy, respect and without harassment. Employees are also required to behave in a way that upholds the ASIO Values and the integrity and good reputation of the Organisation. Any employee who acts in a manner contrary to these values may be in breach of the ASIO Code of Conduct and/or the mandatory requirements of a security clearance holder.

*If you are concerned about aspects of your own behavior, you are encouraged to speak to psychological services; Human Resources Branch or Internal Security (IS) Branch.*

Staff who have concerns regarding a colleague who may be a perpetrator of domestic violence should consider reporting the matter to IS Branch. If an act of violence occurs in the workplace, the police will be notified.

### Perpetrators of domestic and family violence

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence are encouraged to **seek assistance**, access appropriate **support services** and to **self-report**.

## Next Steps

ASIO is committed to addressing domestic and family violence and this will be an evolving process. Over the coming months, our relevant policies will be updated to better reflect the support options available to staff affected by domestic and family violence. Our Domestic and Family Violence Toolkit will be updated as guidelines are published and new resources are added.

<sup>i</sup> Family Violence Act 2016 (ACT); Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 (NSW); Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007 (NT); Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989 (QLD); Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009 (SA); Family Violence Act 2004 (TAS); Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (VIC); Restraining Orders Act 1997 (WA).

<sup>ii</sup> Statistics obtained from multiple sources: Bryant, W. & Bricknall, S. (2017). *Homicide in Australia 2012-2014: National Homicide Monitoring Program report*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2ozctxh>; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2016 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>; Brownridge, D. (2006) 'Partner violence against women with disabilities: Prevalence, risks and explanations', *Violence against Women*, vol. 12, no., pp.805–22.; Website: Hall and Partners Open Mind. (2015). *The Line campaign. Summary of Research Findings*. Melbourne: Our Watch. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2Cd1O5c>; *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children*, Department of Social Services

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10\\_2016/fact\\_sheet\\_on\\_how\\_the\\_third\\_action\\_plan\\_supports\\_culturally\\_and\\_linguistically\\_diverse\\_women\\_and\\_their\\_children.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2016/fact_sheet_on_how_the_third_action_plan_supports_culturally_and_linguistically_diverse_women_and_their_children.pdf); *Family violence in an LGBTIQ context*, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRVC)

<sup>iii</sup> *Domestic Violence and the Workplace – Employee, Employer and Union Resources*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC) and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, P. 3

<sup>iv</sup> *Frequently Asked Questions around Domestic Violence*, Diversity Council Australia, 9 March 2018 (accessed 3 September 2018)



